

An Infographic on Open Source Software Licensing

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Open Source Software Licensing

Open-source *adj.* /*oʊ.pən sɒs.ɪs*/

Of, or relating to a product which is licensed to permit modifications and redistribution of its source code. [5]

License Release Dates



Original BSD

MIT

Original GPL

MPL

LGPL Updated

Creative Commons

“Making Linux GPL'd was definitely the best thing I ever did.”

Linus Torvalds

Copyright
Copyleft
Allows proprietary use
Standard disclaimer
Name usable in promotion

Copyleft *adj.* /*kɒpɪːləft*/

Allowing use, distribution, and modification on the condition that any redistributions or modifications also be licensed under the same condition and, in the case of computer software, are accompanied by source code. [2]

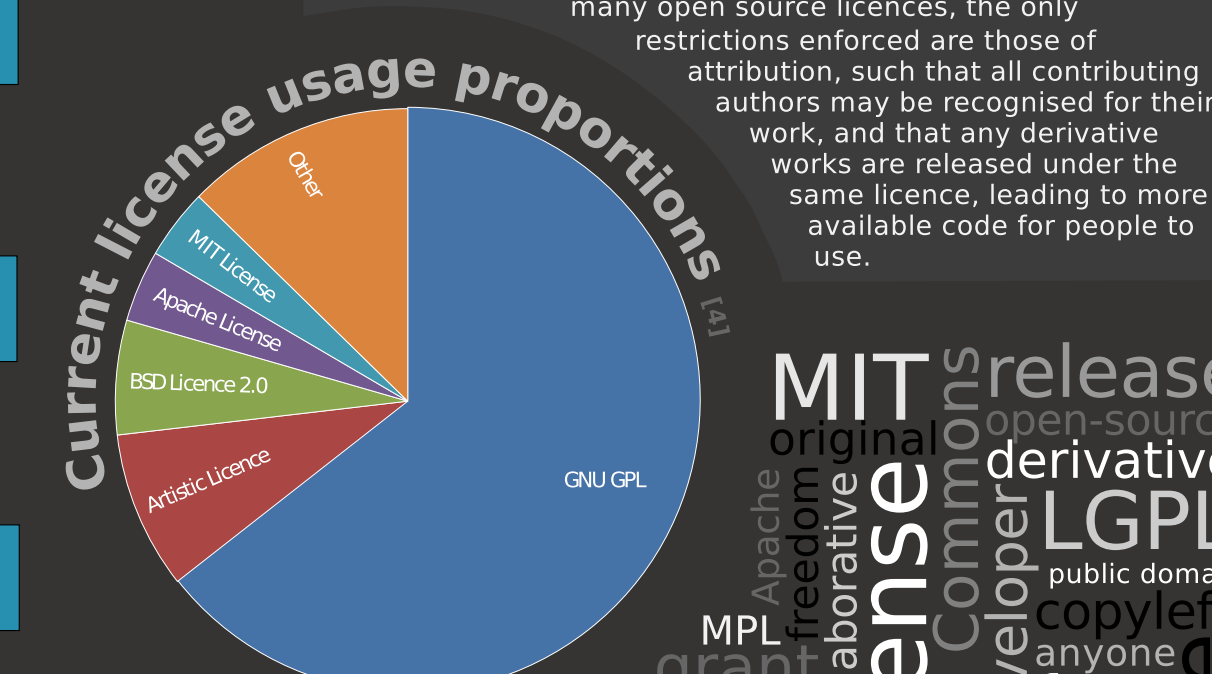
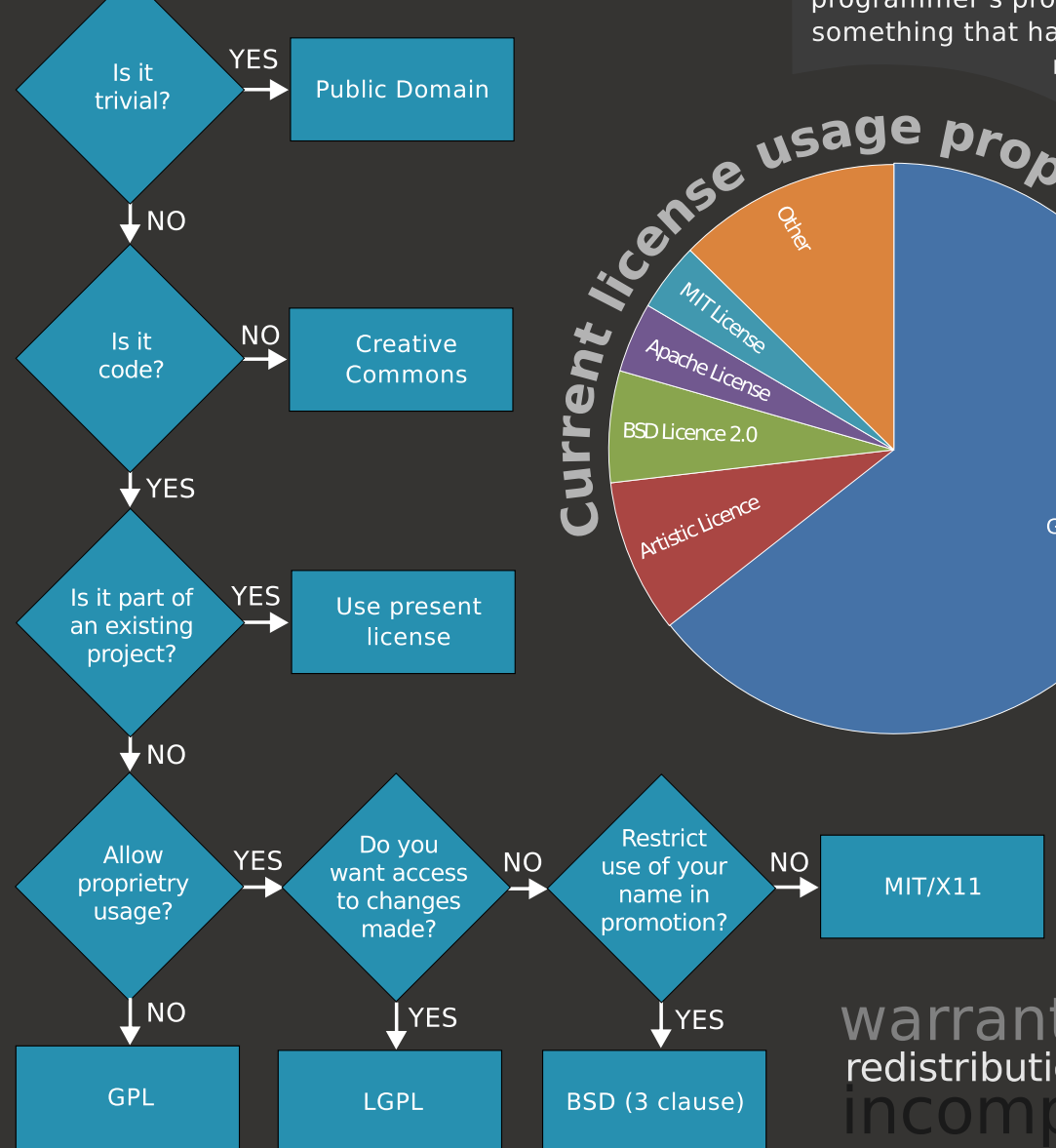
Public Domain *n.* /*ˈpʌblɪk dæməɪn*/

The feature of intellectual property being not protected under patent or copyright, i.e. no person or other legal entity can establish proprietary interests. [3]

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

The idea of using other peoples work and ideas to help with your own is not new; in fact the phrase "standing on the shoulders of giants" has been around since the twelfth century. The free software movement has embraced this idea, by enabling people to access, extend and reuse source code written under an open source licence. This idea is considered to be the antithesis of "reinventing the wheel", a practice which is common when software is protected by copyright and hidden behind binaries. Because of these restrictive licences, a lot of a programmer's productivity is spent re-implementing something that has been done a thousand times before. With many open source licences, the only restrictions enforced are those of attribution, such that all contributing authors may be recognised for their work, and that any derivative works are released under the same licence, leading to more available code for people to use.

Choosing An Open Source License



MIT release original open-source derivative LGPL public domain copyleft anyone free BSD contribution Artistic license developer terms GPL code holder copyright law clause work GPL redistribution incompatibility warranty redistribution holder copyright law clause work GPL

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References [1] Beard, A and Kim, H, 2007. A Survey on Open Source Software Licenses. [online] ACM Digital Library. Available at: <http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1229673> [Accessed 7th December 2010]. [2] Wiktionary, 2010. Copyleft. [online] Available at: <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/copyleft> [Accessed 5th December 2010]. [3] Wiktionary, 2010. Public Domain. [online] Available at: <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/public_domain> [Accessed 5th December 2010]. [4] Black Duck Software, 2010. Top 20 Most Commonly Used Licenses in Open Source Projects. [online] Available at: <http://www.blackducksoftware.com/oss/licenses#top20> [5] Wiktionary, 2010. Open-source. [online] Available at: <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/open-source> [Accessed 5th December 2010].

Abstract

In our infographic we present information about Open Source Licensing, an important issue in the software development world today. It includes information about the history of open source software, the ideology of the free software movement, and makes recommendations as to which open source license could be right for your project.

Introduction

Our infographic is intended as an introductory resource for Open Source Licensing. Our aims were to produce a resource that contained a lot of useful information accessible very quickly, could be used as a supportive teaching resource, and could also serve as a useful reference to have available. The result can be found to the left.

Background

The use of Open Source software is increasing rapidly and, as more people feel the need to contribute, the knowledge of licensing is becoming more important. Educating people as to why open source software is a good idea was the motivation behind the "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants" section. It is always a good idea to let people know why they should learn something before they do so as it's likely to be considerably more successful. The infographic serves as a primer for open source software licensing and, as such, no background knowledge is assumed. With this resource, one can conduct more involved research into the major licenses.

Methods

Using the background knowledge gained by interaction with the licenses over a longer period of time, we were able to produce the feature and flow diagrams. Other research was conducted using authoritative sources (such as the ACM Digital Library) to produce the timeline and usage proportion pie chart, for example. Because open source software is mainly built by online communities, a lot of the sources of information we looked at were found online.

Discussion

The flow chart for choosing a license could be especially useful since, more often than not, people want their work to be used by others but don't know how to license it, or what license to give it. The flow chart is, in essence, a walk through for the table above it, detailing each license's features. The pie chart used in the infographic is a quickly-accessible way of seeing the proportion of use of the main licenses. The flow chart is not an exhaustive method to decide on a particular license; only the major licenses are presented here. There may be a better suited license for a particular case, but that is beyond the scope of the resource. The final decision is down to all of the project's authors.

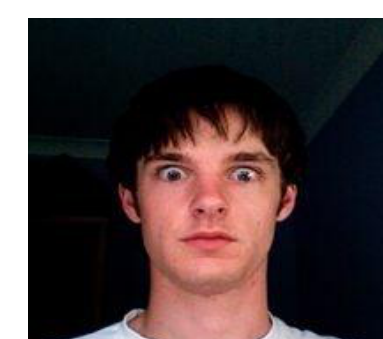
Conclusion

When a viewer picks up the resource for the first time, they will be able to quickly identify the most popular licenses, know the features of each license mentioned, and know whether a particular license is suitable for their work. Even if the information they were looking for is not there, the viewer will gain an understanding of key phrases in the topic area to aid their research.

The Infographic can be found at: <http://www.edshare.soton.ac.uk/6346/>

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